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ABSTRACT

Offering a research-oriented perspective on the interdependence of children and their environments and the role of caregivers in children's development, the theoretical system discussed in this paper consists of four main ideas. These ideas concern (1) independent dependence; (2) zones of free movement, proximal development, and promoted action; (3) differential constraining/progressive empowerment; and (4) the dialectical nature of adult/child interaction. Children are viewed as dependent to the extent that their own structure and the structure of their environments establish boundaries determining the range of possible action; within those boundaries children may act independently. The concept of zones figuratively differentiates aspects of child/environment relationships and determines contexts in which children are "canalized" toward socially appropriate actions, perform actions with support which they cannot perform independently, or receive encouragement from caregivers to perform certain actions. The linked concepts of "differential constraining/progressive empowerment" denote social processes occurring within the zone of promoted action that are typical of interaction between experts and novices. Finally, it is argued that phenomena involved in adult/child transaction at any age are inherently dialectical, and not simple. Methodological implications of the theoretical system are discussed and illustrated. (RH)

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Dependent Independence in Adult-Child Relationships

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Dependent Independence in Adult-Child Relationships

The theoretical system presented here is a collaborative effort. It represents an attempt to integrate two theoretical approaches which, while originally derived independently, have much in common. As such, it is an outline of a theoretical system which we find useful for understanding children's development within social-cultural environments and the facilitative role played by others in this development.

Considered most broadly, we construe one of the major tasks of developmental psychology to be the investigation of the interdependent relationships between the developing child and his or her physical and social environment. Such a position explicitly assumes that development can only be understood through an approach that recognizes that development (and its understanding) is inherently context-dependent.

In the investigation of children's participation in, and understanding of, their world, such an approach recognizes that the developing child acts within a structured social context, his or her environment. This environment, and the social others which are a part of it, organize the set of possible psychological actions which are available to the child at a given time. However, children's actions themselves change this environment and in so doing create

opportunities for actions which were not previously available.[1]

Interdependence of Child and Environment

Thus, our approach starts with the observation that the newborn child inherits not only her biological and genetic background, but also the organization of the environment into which she is born. Both the developing organism and its environment are organized in structural ways. Both consist of interdependent relations between physical, biological, psychological, and cultural influences on development (Valsiner, 1987; Winegar and Renninger, 1985). Children's actions are interdependent with the possibilities that the environment affords. As the newborn develops, her actions begin to re-organize the environment. Likewise, others around the child purposefully re-organize the child's environment and promote socially relevant goals. It is the others in the environment who guide the child's development in accordance with their personal goals and on the basis of their interpretations of cultural expectations. Our claim for child-environment interdependence rests on the belief that since children's development takes place within this physical and social environment, the organization of

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1. The use of the term "actions" here, and throughout this paper, is intended to include perceptual experience and semiotic activity as well as motor activity.

children's perceptions, representations and actions must relate, in some way, to the organization of their environment.

However, the nature of relationships between child and environment becomes particularly complicated in the case of human ontogeny, where children gradually come to act in ways that go beyond the immediately available environmental conditions. Children learn to change their environment, often pursuing some shorter- or longer-term objectives, and thus participate in their own further development. Often the direction in which child development is perceived to move is characterized as a transition from dependence to independence. However, such a description overlooks the basic interdependence of child and environment relationships.

Instead of thinking of the concepts of dependence and independence as polar opposites, it is possible to see them as characteristics that are embedded in the same whole. In the case of the organism-environment system as that whole, the interdependence of these concepts can be helpful in explaining how children develop in ways that are simultaneously dependent and independent of the environment. Thus, child development can be described as proceeding through different states of "independent dependence" rather into independence.

This alternative concept illustrates the difference between common-sense and scientific terminology quite well. From the perspective of everyday discourse, a child (or adult) who acts or thinks "on his own" and is not seen to be influenced by others, is considered to be independent. However, from the perspective of developmental sciences that rely on the axiom that organism-environment transactions are necessary for development, the child can never be truly independent from her environment. In the present context, we can think of an 'independent' child, as used in the common sense, as actually being independently dependent. If we look at the child's immediate action, it may seem to be unconstrained by any factors, and any efforts to introduce constraints may be actively blocked by the child. However, if we consider the phenomenon more carefully it becomes evident that the seemingly 'independent' action has emerged in the context of the child's dependence on his environment and partners in social interaction.

Interestingly, such partners may facilitate the emergence of the notion of independence as part of the child's developing cognitive system. Consider an observation of a mother and her 3.5 month-old infant. The mother tries to get the infant to pull herself up from her back, first to a sitting position, and then to a standing position. The mother manages to get the infant to hold onto a ring, and

pulls the child up to a standing position, commenting: "You are a big girl! You did it all by yourself!" It was obvious that the task described could only be accomplished by the joint action of mother and infant, with, in this case, the mother playing the leading role. Nevertheless, after the task was accomplished the mother discounted her own role and attributed the responsibility for success fully to the child's action -- all by *herself!* (Valsiner, 1987).

This particular exchange occurred when an observer who shared the mother's culture background was present. Thus, the mother's verbal comment played a communicative role in showing herself and her child to the observer from the *culturally expected perspective* of doing one's best for the baby by promoting early independence. On the one hand, the mother's verbal commentary about the child's behavior constitutes early exposure of the child to the use of language in making self-attributions in situations where the child depends on cooperation with others for accomplishing some task. On the other hand, the mother demonstrated her own independent dependence by sending a message to the observer that was prescribed by the mother's own socialization background.[2]

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2. And of course, the observer demonstrates his own independent dependence in his interpretation of the mother's message.

Thus, in the present context, the meaning of independent dependence is defined in ways that include organism-environment relationships. In terms of the *boundaries that define the range of possibilities* of action, any organism is fully *dependent* on both its own structure and that of the environment. At the same time, *within* the boundaries of possibilities set by an environment an organism may (but need not always) have the opportunity of choice between different ways of acting, or the opportunity of constructing new ways of acting which are possible given the particular coupling of the organism and the environment.

As presented here, the concept of independent dependence is closely linked with an ecological approach in psychology where the person-environment interdependence is itself turned in to the object of investigation (Valsiner & Benigni, 1986). Organization of the person and organization of the environment specify the dependence of the person on the environment, and that dependence makes it possible for the person to act independently (though within limits) upon the environment in an effort to re-structure it. When the environment is transformed, its relationship with the person is changed and this change, in turn, guides further development.

Social Processes and Socialization

Further elaboration of the multiciplicity of the courses

of development implied by individual-environment interdependence requires description of processes which can be used to describe organism-environment relationships and their development. One heuristic scheme for understanding the process of children's socialization which recognizes child-environment interdependence has been developed by Jaan Valsiner (1984, 1987). Valsiner proposes that the child's environment can be represented as three "zones" which characterize interacting aspects of child-environment relationships. These zones represent psychological spaces within which actions or potential actions of the developing child can be figuratively placed. The value of this scheme is that it provides a common framework which explicitly recognizes child-environment interdependence and allows the consideration socialization processes which occur across a great number of settings.

The most inclusive of these zones, is called the Zone of Free Movement (ZFM). The ZFM is a physical and social space which "structures the child's access to different areas in the environment, to different objects within these areas, and to different ways of acting on these objects" (Valsiner, 1984, p. 67). The boundaries of the ZFM are defined by the prohibiting actions of caregivers which are readily observed when the child attempts actions which are outside of this zone. The ZFM canalizes children toward socially appropriate

actions within their environment. The use of the term canalization here is intended to emphasizes that the ZFM establishes limits on children's actions but does not determine particular actions, as any parent or teacher will confirm.

The second zone in this scheme is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD, first proposed by Vygotsky (1978), contains those actions which a child can perform with the cooperative support of social others, but is as yet unable to perform independently.

The third zone is the Zone of Promoted Action (ZPA). This zone is comprised of those actions which the caregiver strives to encourage. However, while adults may promote particular actions, children need not comply. Unlike the ZFM, a child's non-compliance within the ZPA usually is not met by limiting actions of the caregiver.

In related work, Ann Renninger and I have discussed the general nature of social interaction between experts and novices. In contrast to definitions of experts solely based on criteria such as amount or organization of information in a specific domain, our definition of experts included consideration of cognitive, social, affective, and goal-directed characteristics of relationships. According to our our definition, experts are individuals who are credited with having skills or knowledge in an area, who are placed in

a social role which acknowledges these abilities, and whose goal in a specific relationship is to promote the development of understanding in another (a novice). Thus, relationships such as caregiver-child, teacher-student and client-therapist usually fulfill these criteria for expert-novice relationships. We observed that in a variety of formal and informal teaching/learning situations, there appeared to be a complementarity between the actions of the expert and the actions of the novice (Renninger & Winegar, 1985; 1986). Specifically, we have claimed that, with experience, experts increasingly relinquish control over novices' actions, and, novices take increasing responsibility for their own performance. We referred to this complementarity between expert and novice as "differential constraining/progressive empowerment."

I have recently begun to think of differential constraining/progressive empowerment as a more detailed description of the social processes which occur within Valsiner's Zone of Promoted Action, specifically those processes which occur when the ZPA and ZPD initially overlap and eventually move to within the ZFM as this latter zone is reorganized. The term "differential constraining" refers to "experts' tendency to adjust, usually unreflectively, the amount and type of support they provide for novices' performance. Such constraining is 'differential' since

experts alter both the form and degree of constraining they provide as the novice exhibits increasing responsibility for acceptable performance. The term 'progressive empowerment' refers to the increasing responsibility for performance of socially acceptable action demonstrated by the novice. Novices internalize constraints initially provided by the expert and, in so doing, become increasingly 'self-constraining.' Increased responsibility assumed by the novice, in turn necessitates further adjustment on the part of the expert. Thus, differential constraining/progressive empowerment describes complementary aspects of a social process in which experts provide direction and support for novices. This direction and support simultaneously enables a novice to complete an immediate action and develop further understanding of the activity" (Winegar, in press).

Dialectical Nature of Adult-Child Interaction

In transactions such as these, the adult (who is more advanced than the child in his/her cultural socialization, thus an "expert") constrains the actions of the child ("novice") in a manner that is selective and dynamic. That is, only some actions of a child in a given setting are constrained, and those only in specific ways; and the "rules" for child's action, set up by adult's constraining in one setting, can be changed instantly in another. Ontogenetically, (and microgenetically) the initial

relatively strict constraining of the child's action by the adult is progressively lessened as the child develops. Further, the adult may gradually cease to use the most efficient ways to take care of children and use less efficient ones for the sake of providing the child with learning experience that should eventually make the child self-sufficient in action. This process has a helical nature, as even at the more complex levels of development both the child and adult may display actions that seem to resemble similar ones at an earlier time in development (e.g., regression). Further, the phenomena involved at adult-child transaction at any age are inherently dialectical. Thus, what to an outside observer may look like "permissiveness" on behalf of the adult caregiver may actually be a strategy to restrict the child in a certain action domain. Furthermore, parental "restrictiveness" at one age level turns into "permissiveness" at another, and becomes "restrictive" again at a third. With parents' assistance and example, the child may move from a "novice" state in knowledge of the world, not only into an "expert" state, but further on to a state in which the child can purposeful vary the display of such knowledge to attain some objectives (for example, children's strategies of "manipulating" their parents).

Thus, children's participation in, and understanding of

their world emerges from social interactions with multiple others in a variety of settings. However, children's understanding of their world is not a direct mapping of the constraints on action provided by others. Just as children's level of cognitive development organizes their exploratory manipulations of objects, their level of social understanding organizes their choice of actions during social encounters and limits the information they can extract from exchanges with social partners.[3] Further, the constraints of others do not reflect rigid rules and goals held together by temporal and causal structure. Rather, the constraints of others are active negotiations between participants that vary as circumstances and others dictate.

Methodological Implications

The theoretical system outlined above has several important methodological implications. First, since its emphasis is on "becoming" rather than "being" it does not support the measurement of static outcome as a research strategy. Instead, our approach is best used to guide

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3. In making a distinction between cognitive development and social understanding, we intend to imply a distinction in *content* of knowledge only. While such a distinction may be useful as an investigative heuristic, it should not be taken as indicating a difference in developmental *processes* within cognitive and social domains. Since development occurs within social/cultural environments, we consider all knowledge to be social in that it has meaning and value that is socially and culturally derived.

descriptions of processes of socialization rather than for assessment of levels of social cognition or competence, for example. Second, since a core construct of our approach is person-environment interdependence, many of the traditional statistical tools of psychological experimentation cannot be used without obscuring important findings. Specifically, since the approach described here presupposes both that different developmental paths may lead to similar outcome and that similar developmental paths may lead to different outcomes, statistical techniques that treat variability between subjects as noise and so attempt to report data on a statistically derived modal child, are inappropriate under the current scheme.

So what's left? So far we have relied primarily on two techniques. First, we have used relatively low level descriptive statistics such as the proportion of time spent in particular activities (Valsiner, 1987; Winegar, in press). Second, we have employed within-system analysis of longitudinal case studies of adult-child interaction (Valsiner, 1987; Winegar, in press).

Illustrative Example

Let me try to illustrate our approach with an example of teacher-child interaction during preschool snacktime as it centers around one particular aspect of this event - learning to pour your own drink. This is a skill which the teacher

clearly encouraged the children to practice and develop and so it represents an example of expert-novice interaction within the Zone of Promoted Action. On the first day of school, the teacher instructed the children in pouring pitchers of drink in the following manner: Teacher holds up two pitchers of liquid and says, "Today we have apple juice and water. This pitcher has apple juice and the pitcher with the red mark has water." Teacher asks a child which he would like to drink. The teacher then sets the appropriate pitcher next to the child's right hand. She then says, "Okay, hold the pitcher in one hand and your cup in the other." Teacher helps child by guiding his hands with her's, then says, "That's good."

Let's place the pouring of the pitcher into the three zones described above. First, since it is an action which the child apparently cannot accomplish on their own, it falls outside the ZFM. Second, since it is an action which children can accomplish with the support of the teacher but not yet accomplish independently, it falls within the ZPD. Third, since it is an action encouraged by the teacher, it also falls within the ZPA. It fact, in this case, the ZPD and ZPA overlap. Both are initially outside the ZFM. The promotion of this action through teacher support is aimed at reorganizing the children's ZFM to include this action. Thus, one goal of the teacher's actions is to reorganize the

ZFM to include this previously unaccomplishable action.[4]

To continue with this example, several days after this first episode, the teacher's style of instruction and degree of assistance is quite different. On the sixth day the pouring of drinks goes as follows: Teacher gets two pitchers of liquid and, holding up one of them, says, "Who remembers what is in the pitcher that has the red mark on it?" Holds up pitcher with read mark and repeats, "What's in this one?" After a pause, several children respond, "Water!" Teacher replies, "Water! And we have orange juice. We have orange juice today." Pitchers are passed around to the children. Each, in turn, pours his or her own drink holding the pitcher in one hand and the cup in the other. The teacher, who is passing out grapes to each child, watches the children pour and occasionally expedites the passing of the pitchers. On occasion she comments on the pouring, for example asking a child, " Can you pour your juice by yourself?", but at no time does she provide assistance for the act of pouring. Later in snacktime a child asks, "Can you help me pour?" The teacher stands behind the child, watching the child and

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4. Note that this reorganization is not the only possible goal of expert-novice interaction. It is perhaps just as common that an expert wants to reorganize the ZFM so that particular actions of the novice are no longer within this space. Much of child socialization takes this latter form (e.g., learning to cross the street, to not eat found food-like items, etc.).

lightly guiding the child's hands while the child pours the liquid. When completed, the teacher says, "You did a very nice job."

By this day, the ZFM has begun to re-organize to include the independent pouring of a drink. The action as a whole is still within the ZPA and aspects of the action, those the children can only do with assistance, remain within the ZPD.

On the eighth day of school, three children are observed sitting at the snack table prior to the start of snacktime. Though pitchers of drink and cups are on the table, no teacher is present. In turn, the children each pour their own juice; each holds the pitcher in the right hand and steadies the cup with their left. The pouring is accomplished without incident and before the teacher returns.

By this day, the ZFM has be re-organized to include the independent pouring of a drink and this action is no longer within the ZPD. Pouring your own drink no longer needs to be promoted by the teacher and no longer requires her assistance for completion. This suggests that unlike previously, incorrect pouring of the pitcher by the children should lead to limiting actions by the teacher.

These examples also illustrate the social process of differential constraining/progressive empowerment which can be observed in the snacktime setting. With experience, there

is a shift in regulation of behavior from primarily a teacher responsibility to primarily a child responsibility. The teacher's constraining of the children's action is different in the second episode than in the first. Initially the teacher guided the children through the action physically and verbally; later she relies on verbal guidance only. However, the pitcher is still placed next to the child's right hand, and, in so doing, the teacher provides environmental support for the child's manipulation of the pitcher.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by briefly summarizing what I see at the important points of this paper. Development is at the same time both dependent and independent. The process of development is considered dependent in the sense that it is always guided by some set of constraints (in psychology: external and physical, or internal and cognitive/emotional) that organize the development in some, rather than other future direction. However, the *exact* future states (i.e., within the general direction provided by constraints) of the developing organism is necessarily independent (unpredictable in any exact way from some previous state).

The observations reported above illustrate processes of socialization that occur in daily settings. I interpret these observations as suggesting the existence of complementary capabilities in children and processes in

social interaction that support the child's developing understanding of their social world. Children bring to social interactions a sensitivity to the constraints on actions (and language and perception) placed by relevant social others. Further, children rely heavily on such constraints in order to cut through the complexity of social events and so begin to understand the relative invariants of these social exchanges. Theoretical constructs such as psychological "Zones" and social processes of differential constraining and progressive empowerment, provide a useful framework within which to investigate the interdependence between children and their environment. Through such investigations we may gain greater understanding of the processes through which children construct functional meaning of their social world and, through their own actions, alter and refine their interactions with others.

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